

THE WALKING TREES.

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

LEO'S SECRET.

LEO lived in a country house with his mamma and papa and brothers and sisters; and the children had plenty of room to play and make themselves happy in the gardens, and through the lawns, and in the wood behind the house. They were all merry, romping little children, but Leo was somewhat different from the rest, for he would sometimes take quiet fits and sit at the window gazing at the sky and the distant landscape till his nurse would come and shake him up, wondering what in the world he could see so far away.

"I am watching to see if those trees will move," he said, one day.

"Of course they move, you silly boy!" said nurse. "All trees move when the wind blows."

Leo shook his head. That was not what he meant at all, but he was quite sure that nurse would never understand him; so he said no more.

Leo had a secret about these trees, and one day he whispered it fearfully to Patty, his favourite sister.

"Leo," said Patty, "*do* tell me what you see over there, and I'll give you this large piece of sugarstick."

"I don't care for the sugarstick," said Leo, gallantly; "you may keep it for yourself, Patty, and I'll tell you all the same."

"Take half, then," said the little girl, breaking it in her pinafore; and Leo took half, and, as the two sucked the sugarstick with their heads together, Leo's grand secret came out in a whisper.

"It's those trees over there, Patty," said the boy, pointing with his sticky little finger towards seven tall ash-trees which grew on a ridge of upland against the horizon. They stood at regular intervals in a row, and were crisply defined against the sky, their foliage growing somewhat fantastically, which gave them a wild, unsettled air.

"I see them," said Patty; "they are quite like the other trees."

"No," said Leo; "look how shaggy they are, as if they had just come off a long, long journey. And so they have, Patty—*they walk*."

"O Leo, you goose!"

"Very well, Patty, go away and play with the other babies. I am very sorry I took your sugarstick."

"Sulky-puss!" cried Patty, laughing, and danced off to her play again.

But Leo remained sitting at the window, his head on his little

hand, gazing over the country at the trees which so puzzled his fancy. Nurse was at her tea, so he was not disturbed, and twilight began to descend on the landscape. He looked so intently for a long time that the seven ashes began to dance before him. But he rubbed his eyes, and there they stood quite still "with all their hair on end," as he said to himself; as still as if they had never moved in their lives.

Nevertheless, Leo felt now more sure than ever that they set off every night for a long walk out over the world, and came back before people were up in the morning. They looked exactly like a file of soldiers. "One, two—one, two!" said Leo, shuffling his feet. "Oh, they won't move while I am looking. How I wish I could sit up a whole night, and then I should catch them!"

Soon after this he had to go to bed, and fell sound asleep thinking about the trees. In the middle of the night he awoke and could not go asleep again, but lay wondering whether the ash-trees were now gone off on a journey, or whether they were still standing on the upland "with their hair on end." The moonlight was shining faintly in the room, and all his little brothers were fast asleep in their cribs round the wall. Leo sat up and looked about him. From the window of the day-nursery he knew he could see all he wished to see. Could he venture out of his bed and creep in there without disturbing nurse or any of the children? All the doors were open, and he had often heard nurse declare that she "slept so light the squeak of a mouse would waken her." And the boards in the floor might squeak like a mouse. Well, let her waken and he would tell her all about it. He was not going to do any harm.

The worst she could do would be to go down to papa's study in the morning, and tell him that Master Leo was going mad about the seven trees on the hill, and that they had better be cut down before the boy grew up an idiot. Nurse was such an old nurse in the house and so good when anybody was sick, that Leo knew she could say what she liked. And then his papa would talk to him. *That* would be no trouble, at all events; he loved his papa and was not afraid of him. "So here goes!" said Leo, and the little bare feet went pattering across the bed-room floor, and the boards did not squeak, and Leo found himself at the nursery window, his face pressed to the pane, and his heart beating so hard that he could scarcely breathe.

The world outside looked very dim, for the moonshine was not strong enough to light it up. Leo rubbed the pane and made it clear and looked very hard at the ridge against the horizon. The hill was as bare as the palm of the little boy's hand. The trees were gone!

Leo drew a long breath, and rubbed his eyes, and looked again. He gazed around at the other parts of the landscape, but trees and bushes were all in their places; all were there to be seen—except the seven ash-trees on the upland, which were gone.

"Aha!" said Leo, "I have caught them!" and he felt very much astonished although he had expected to see just what he had seen: a bare hill and no trees, the trees being away, as he had known, on their midnight ramble. He sat waiting a long time hoping to see them coming back; but at last he got very cold and sleepy, and was glad

to creep into his bed. Of one thing, however, he was sure after this, that the trees did walk every night.

He said nothing to anyone about this strange discovery, for little boys do not like to be laughed at.

CHAPTER II.

HE GOES OFF WITH THE TREES.

AFTER this Leo thought more and more about the seven strange ash-trees, and he never ceased wondering about where they went and what they saw on their way when they were off on their midnight excursions over the world. At last one night he could not go asleep at all for thinking, and, growing quite wild with curiosity, he got up and dressed himself, crept down-stairs, unlocked the great hall-door, though he did not reach much above the handle, and stepped out, closing it softly behind him. He was so excited at the time that he did not know he was doing a naughty thing. He meant no harm, and thought he would come back very soon after he had seen how the trees would get themselves up out of the ground, and had watched them start on their march, and observed where they went to. He flew over the lawns and up and down the smooth green slopes, climbed a ditch or two, and soon arrived panting at the foot of the hill whereon stood the curious trees.

There they were, looking more lively and intelligent than ever. They had not stirred as yet, and it was now about midnight. Leo sat down and watched them a little while, then got impatient and approached a yard or two nearer, stealing gradually up and up the hill, never taking his eyes for a moment off the seven mysterious trunks with their fantastic foliage and arms tossed this way and that way over their heads. After a time he got tired of waiting and went boldly up to the stoutest tree of the seven, which stood in the middle of the row, clasped his arms round the trunk, and laid his little cheek against the bark. He did not know exactly how he ought to speak to a tree, but he wanted to explain that he desired it to be friendly and allow him to see it set out for its nightly walk. Then he began to examine the tree and found that right above his head there was a nice roomy seat among the branches. Without stopping to think he put his foot on a twig and sprang up into this nest; and there he sat as comfortable as could be, with his back against the trunk and his arm round a stout bough at either side.

What was to happen next? He did not know, but was sure something strange was going to happen. He saw his father's house nodding good-bye at him from the distant hollow; the stars began to wink at him, and suddenly the moon rolled out from behind the chimneys with a most curious grin, such as he had never seen before, upon her face. "Something is coming!" thought little Leo, and he prepared for a shock. Suddenly he heard a peculiar sound which

made him think at first that a great wind had begun to blow; but that could not be as the leaves on the tree he sat in had not stirred. He peered backward to where the sound came from and then he saw that the first tree of the row of ashes was swaying about in the air, leaning to this side and that, and dragging its roots a little more and a little more out of the earth at each bend of its trunk. "Hallo!" cried Leo, in great delight, "here it comes! We are going to start!" and he leaned forward and watched eagerly as one after another the seven trees uprooted themselves out of the ground and stood with their roots spread upon the hill just like the claws of gigantic crabs. He felt a very odd sensation when his own tree began to perform in this way, but he held on bravely and was rewarded for his courage when he found himself carried slowly down-hill in the arms of the ash, which closed round him in the most friendly manner. "Hold on, little man!" said a burly voice, that sounded like a puff of wind, and off set the seven ash-trees, marching stoutly in single file across the country.

There was a nice opening in the branches just before Leo, so that he could see beautifully out over the world as he was carried along. The moon was so bright that he could see the rivers flowing and the houses sleeping and the fields all smiling under their load of growing grain. The walking trees kept out in the open plains as they marched along, for when moving among other trees they were apt to get their branches entangled and torn about, which was, doubtless, the reason why "their hair always stood on end," as Leo had described it to himself. A little of this annoyance they could not avoid, but they kept generally as much as possible on the edges of the forests. When they met with a river running right across their path, they stepped boldly into it and waded to the opposite bank. They crossed several mountains and passed by numerous towns in the space of half an hour, for they marched as swiftly as any giant in his boots of seven leagues. At last they came to the shores of the sea, and Leo was rather astonished to find that they were going to walk on the ocean. Into it they plunged, however, and floundered along through the waves, passing ships which hailed them through a speaking trumpet. But the trees floated on darkly in the distance without answering the greeting; and Leo was sure the people in the ships must take them for a phantom fleet such as nurse had once told him about, which had been seen by her son, who was a sailor. The trees also passed quite close by the lighthouses, not being like vessels afraid of the rocks, and they very good-naturedly stopped to let Leo look in at the lighthouse windows. A lighthouse was a thing about which Leo had often been very curious, and now, while his ash-tree stood on tip-toes on the ledge of a rock, the little boy put his face to the pane of the chamber of glass and observed all its arrangements to his fullest satisfaction. He saw first the green and then the red light turn round and glare out over the wide black desert of the sea, making the cruel foam glitter round the edges of the fatal rocks. He saw a woman sitting solitary in this lonely chamber of the air, dozing asleep with her head on her hands. Suddenly she started up and listened. No, it was a

calm night ; there were no wrecks out there on the ocean ; but she caught sight of Leo's little pale face looking in at the window and threw up her hands with a shriek. Leo was sorry for this, for he did not like to frighten her, and he tapped at the window in a friendly manner and called to her through the glass that he was only Leo. She did not understand him, however, but screamed more than ever, and fled out of the lighthouse chamber. " We had better move on, I think," said Leo, to the tree, " though I am very sorry, for I should have been glad if she had invited me in. I should not wonder at all if she took me for the ghost of some poor little drowned boy."

" I dare say she did," said the tree, who had by this time become quite conversable ; " but, if you like, we can call and apologise to her when we are coming back again."

And on they went.

CHAPTER III.

LEO ENTERS THE CLOUDS.

THEY soon reached the opposite shores of the sea and walked on and on over a beautiful mountainous country which Leo had never seen before. " You are a daring little fellow," said the ash-tree, to Leo ; " and I am going to show you some things which will be new to you." By this time they had reached the top of a very high mountain, so high that the clouds were quite next door to them.

" We have now come to the end of our journey for to-night," said the ash-tree : and the seven trees stood still on the mountain ridge in a row and stretched themselves, tossing about their branches and rubbing their little twigs against the sky. " We must stay here and rest awhile and enjoy this air which is good for our health. In the meantime you, if you like, can climb my upper branches and get into the clouds. I should like to go too, but I find myself rather clumsy. If you are not very long we will wait till you come back."

Leo was glad to obey, for he certainly had never been in the sky in his life, though he had often wondered to himself at the nursery window whether people on the tops of high mountains could not clamber up into the clouds and go where they pleased. Now he had discovered that this might be done, at least with the help of a walking ash-tree. Right above his head there was a beautiful heap of white fleecy clouds, one rolled over another like piles of snow, and with the moonlight shining faintly on them, showing their hills and hollows, and the places where a traveller ought to put his feet. Leo climbed to the topmost branch of the tree and made a spring.

Oh ! it was like jumping into an open bed of eider-down, and Leo floundered about for several minutes up to his eyes in the soft melting fleece that swelled about him and rolled over him and parted again, letting him look about him. It was some time before he could make an attempt to get on his feet, but after great struggling he found that

he could wade knee deep in the clouds ; and even this was something. He noticed that every spot that was a little darker than the rest, as if with shadow, was also a little harder, so that he could step from one of these spots to the other, and so make his way with great difficulty right up to the top of the great white bank on the edge of the sky.

Here he sat and rested himself, with his legs dangling over the clear part of the sky, which was like a beautiful dark lake with the moon an island of silver in the middle of it. "This is very jolly!" thought Leo. "Now if I could only go on an excursion over to the moon and see what it is made of. It would be the finest fun in the world to walk about in such a beautiful silver place."

This seemed likely to be a very difficult matter, for though the sky had the appearance of a lake and Leo could swim, still he was not at all sure that the lake would prove to be of anything like water, or that he would be able to float himself in it as he could in the tide where he had bathed. He might either drop down towards the earth, or fall through somewhere on the other side, and he did not feel comfortable at the thought of doing either. As he was thinking over this and wondering what he could do he suddenly perceived that the clouds around him were breaking up and taking different shapes and beginning to separate and float about, as he had often watched them doing from the nursery window at home. He got quite frightened at seeing this, for if the clouds were all going to drift away from under him he foresaw that in a few more moments he would be struggling to shift for himself in the dangerous-looking lake. He looked about anxiously for something to hold on by, and was relieved in his mind when he saw one large lump of cloud taking gradually the shape of a man, very like the picture of the genii in the story of the "Fisherman and the Genii" on the shelf in the nursery bookcase. He had a long trailing cloak, very ragged and flimsy at the end and very much spread out, and he had one arm uplifted, and kept raising it a little higher and a little higher every moment, as if pointing to something in the distance. Leo was by this time in a panic, for the last morsel of the cloud bank was just drifting from under him and he flung himself on the skirts of the majestic figure, and cried out as well as he was able :

"Oh! please, sir, will you take me with you wherever you are going?"

"You are very heavy," said the figure, without turning its head. "It would be beneath my dignity to look round at you, so you must tell me what you are and why you want to come with me."

"I came up from the world," said Leo, still holding on, "and I am very anxious to get over quite close to the moon. If I could walk about on it for a little while I should go home quite satisfied. I am what is called 'a boy.' You must have seen a good many of me if you ever looked down on the earth."

"I have no time for such idleness," said the cloudman, loftily, and he raised his arm a little higher than before, taking a still more sublime attitude. "The only thing I know about you is that you are heavy. I never stay long in one shape, and I am very easily dragged

to pieces. I shall break up very soon, even without your help, and if you hold on to me I shall be scattered all the sooner. However, if you like to take the risk of clinging to me you may. I have no objection to steer my course right towards the moon for your accommodation; only I cannot answer for what may happen to you if I should chance to split up before we reach your destination."

"All right!" said Leo; "I can't be worse off than I am." And away they went sailing across the sky.

Leo was nestled in the folds of the cloudman's cloak, and he held on as fast as he was able with both his little fists. It was very hard work, for the cloudman was melting and shifting every moment, and pieces of him were coming off continually in Leo's hands. According as they broke away, Leo grasped at other parts of him, but he did not find it at all a comfortable voyage, and peeped out very anxiously now and again to see if they were coming near the moon. Still his fears did not prevent him from longing for a little news about the cloudman's manner of life.

"Will you kindly tell me a little about yourself," he said, "and where you are going, and where you had been before I met you?"

"A few minutes ago I was fast asleep on the edge of the sky," said the cloudman. "One must have a little rest sometimes. I am going now a long way off to meet the sun who will be arriving by-and-by and must be properly attended."

"But if you go to pieces so fast," said Leo, "what will there be left of you at the end of so long a journey? I wonder why you don't try to hold yourself together."

The cloudman laughed a hollow sort of laugh, and a large piece of his mantle broke off and floated away in the shape of a bird.

"Heavy creatures like you," he said, "must of course be stupid. Can't you understand that I can gather myself up again as fast as I go to pieces? Only it is my nature to keep changing my shape. After I have taken the form of a man for awhile, I must dissolve away into a thousand little pieces. When it is time for me to assume the form of anything large again, the bits all come together. Sometimes I am an elephant, sometimes a dog, often a flock of birds, and it has also been said that I looked very like a whale."

"I have heard of that certainly," said Leo.

At this moment a slight film came between them and the moon. Leo looked up quickly and saw the figure of a beautiful woman hanging in the air close by, with one hand extended, as if to say "hush!" while she gazed down watchfully towards the earth. The moon shone on her face, which was very lovely, and on the dark veil which was drawn over her head and covered her brows. Her garments were dark and gauze-like, and were folded closely round her figure. A little animal was carried under one arm, and its nose peeped forth at Leo, who could not make out whether it was a mouse or a squirrel. She looked so beautiful and peaceful that Leo gazed at her in delight.

"Who is she?" asked Leo of the cloudman.

"She? Why she is an hour, to be sure!" said the cloudman.

"An hour!" repeated Leo, amazed.

"Yes, she is the Third Hour of the night," said the cloudman.

"Well, that is wonderful!" said Leo. "I always knew there were hours, you know, twelve in the day and twelve in the night, but I never knew that they were flying about in the sky like this so that a person could see them."

"There is many a thing you don't know," said the cloudman.

"Tell me some more," said Leo. "What is she doing there? She looks as if she was watching something."

"So she is," said the cloudman. "She is watching the flight of Time and keeping note of him."

"Oh!" cried Leo, "how extraordinary! And can she see Time really—and what is he like?"

"I can't tell you what he is like," said the cloudman. "I never saw him and neither can you, but it's different with her. She keeps her eye on him, and that's what she's there for. If she lost sight of him for a moment, the whole world could not catch him again. And then there would be confusion for you."

"Does she stay there for ever?" asked Leo, looking back at her admiringly as they floated far away and left her.

"Only for as long as herself," answered the cloudman. "Did I not tell you she was an hour? When she is worn out, she will begin to fade, and if you were beside her then you would see her vanish like a light that is blown out. And then there is another one in her place. Perhaps you may meet the fourth hour. But, hallo! you had better look out for yourself, for I am going to pieces!"

Indeed the cloudman had been breaking up rapidly during the last few minutes. Pieces of him, large and small, had floated off every second in the shape of little animals, shells, flowers, and wisps of hay; and now he suddenly split up the back, and one part of him turned into the bough of a tree, while the other became a church-steeple, and both glided away. Nothing was left stationary but his arm, which had grown wonderfully large, and now changed into a little boat with a silver prow. Leo had just time to jump from the branch into the boat before it also began to float away quite in the opposite direction from the moon.

"Well, well!" said Leo, "I am in for adventures, it seems, so I may as well make the best of it. If I don't get to the moon, I suppose I shall come to some other place. If the boat will only hold me in till I reach something else!"

Away scudded the boat as if a puff of wind had impelled it; when to Leo's horror he found the bottom give way, and his two legs went right through and hung downwards in the air. He now expected nothing but to tumble down through the air and got dizzy at the thought, when suddenly he saw right before him a figure which he guessed at once to be the fourth hour of the night. She was even a more beautiful creature than the other, her dress was lighter and more silvery, her veil was thrown back, and her hair was rippling like gold over her shoulders in the moonlight. Her gaze was not so fixed, her face was more smiling than that of the other hour he had seen; and she carried an eagle with folded wings on one of her snow-white arms.

Leo had just time to spring towards her and lay hold of one of her shining white feet before the last fragment of his boat melted to powder and drifted away like a shower of sleet across the sky.

"Oh, save me, dear lady!" cried Leo, delighted to find that she kept quite steady and was not dragged down by his weight. "Save me, and I will bless the hour!" Leo had often heard people blessing the hour when things happened to them, and he kept on saying, "I will bless the hour—I will bless THE HOUR!"

"What is this that is dragging at me?" said the Hour, in a silvery voice. "It must be either grief or idleness or guilt, for only one of these three could make an Hour so intolerably heavy."

"I hope she won't kick me off," cried Leo. "O madam! I am neither grief nor idleness nor guilt, I assure you. Oh, do take pity on me and leave me on a lump of cloud somewhere, if not on the moon; or else I shall tumble down on the earth and be killed."

"Do I know you at all?" asked the Hour. "Oh, I can see a face looking up at me now! Are you not one of those little cherubs that are in pictures? I think I knew you in the gallery where I am hanging on the wall the best part of my time."

"No," said Leo, humbly, "I am not a cherub, though I have seen the ones you mean leaning over the edge of a cloud. I wish indeed I were one of them, for they have got only heads and wings, and can live in the skies. It is my great heavy body and my arms and legs that weigh me down. I am sorry to say you don't know me at all, for I am always asleep in my crib at this hour of the night—I beg your pardon, madam—I mean while you are flying about this way watching the time."

"It is very odd," said the Hour. "I never knew the like of it before; but then I only live the length of myself once in every journey that the sun makes round the world; so my experience of things in general is not very great. Get on my eagle's back, little face, and he will carry you so far as the Dawn, where you will be sure to find some pretty solid clouds for a while."

The eagle at once dropped from her arm and Leo found himself astride on its back in a twinkling.

"Make haste to return," cried the Hour to the eagle, "for my time is nearly up."

And off flew the eagle with Leo on its back, far away from the moon, which had grown very dim by this time and had somehow fallen quite down to one side of the sky.

CHAPTER IV.

HE ARRIVES AT THE GATES OF SUNRISE.

THE eagle flew so swiftly across the sky that Leo quite lost his breath. He was just able to gasp out, "What in the world are you?" and the eagle to answer, "I am only a Moment," before the journey was at an end, and the little boy was lying in a heap of clouds so deep and solid that it seemed pretty sure they would be a resting-place for him for a considerable time to come. It was well he was safe, for Leo had lost his senses from the rapidity of his voyage, and lay for a long time quite unconscious among the clouds.

When he recovered, he found that the whole scene had changed. He sat up and looked around him and saw that the moon had disappeared, and the dark lake in which the clouds were floating had turned grey. There was a pale white light over everything, and Leo said to himself, "I suppose it is morning."

He soon saw that there was a great bustle going on in the sky, and turning his eyes to the east beheld the most wonderful sight he had ever looked upon. One magnificent pillar of a great gate was already standing and the other was getting quickly built. He could not see who was building it or where it was coming from, but it was rising and growing before his eyes, and in a few more moments it was complete. This gate was made of gigantic pearls, mingled with diamonds and other precious stones, and silver palm-trees stood behind each pillar spreading their wide and delicate leaves above it. The bars of the gate were of gold, and it was shut. Outside the gate a crowd of countless figures were pressing towards it. Some knelt in groups together with their arms interlaced, some stood still with their faces raised and their hands clasped. Some lay flat on their faces, and others had their arms outstretched to the gate, and numbers kept moving and shifting and changing their position every instant.

"What *can* they be expecting?" thought Leo. "Something will come out of that gate, I dare say, and I shall see it, if the clouds will only keep steady long enough. Oh, I hope they will. I want so much to see what will come out."

The clouds seemed quite firm and quiet just at present; so Leo got his chin well up above the highest lump and kept gazing with all his might at the gate.

Suddenly all the assembled crowd of people began to blush greatly as it seemed to Leo. Their faces got very red and their arms and hands, and presently their very clothes got red. They nearly all wore some kind of very long skirts or trains or mantles, and, wonderful to tell, these draperies all turned as red as their faces!

"Well," said Leo, "I have often seen people getting red in the face, but I never knew that clothes could blush before."

Redder and redder the people grew, however, and then Leo looked at the gate, which was also now glowing in the most beautiful crimson

light. The precious stones flashed, and the palm-trees twinkled, and Leo could scarcely look at them they were so dazzlingly bright. Then he glanced back at the crowd of people. Some were falling on their knees and others were springing up. Some dropped back and sank away as if they had died or fainted, and some stood up on the shoulders of the rest waving banners which turned to gold as they raised them. At the same time he noticed that the people were differently dressed from what they had been. At first they had been all robed in silver grey; after the blushing began they had seemed to be clad in rose-colour; but now many of them had got mantles of the most gorgeous purple dye and also head-dresses of gold. He began now to distinguish the people better, and saw kings and queens and knights and beautiful ladies and little children. Some of them carried gold baskets full of fruit and flowers upon their heads, some strewed gold and precious stones over the sky, and some kept waving draperies and long branches of palm. There were also very poor-looking people among the crowd, a good many with crutches, with tied-up heads and legs, and hands out-stretched as if for alms; but even these had a dash of gold about them somewhere, so that they looked very magnificent for beggars, and not at all like those whom you see on the earth. Away behind the crowd Leo fancied he saw gilded towers shining, and beautiful woods of golden trees, and the shimmering of many colours as if there were gardens and orchards and tawny meadows in the distance.

"I suppose," said Leo, to himself, "that is where these wonderful people live. What a curious place this sky-country is! Now, if I could only know what it is that they have all come out to look at."

He turned once more to the gate, and was just in time to see it part slowly, slowly, till it stood wide open, and the next instant a river of gold poured out through the opening and flooded the sky. It did not seem to hurt or wet the people, though it flowed just like water, but it sprinkled them all over with golden spray, so that they glittered a thousand times more than they had glittered before. Then figures began to march slowly through the gate. First, came ten splendid purple giants waving gold banners, next twelve crimson knights blowing golden bugles, then twenty tiny gold and silver dwarfs, rolling and frolicking and tumbling head over heels as they came along. After these walked a hundred silver virgins with lamps in their hands burning with an orange flame, and following these, a thousand fiery youths swinging censers. Then came a leash of wild horses, snow-white, with golden manes and scarlet hoofs, and a little cherub with wings flew along with them, holding them all in his hand by a silver thread. A team of purple oxen came next with gilded horns and their necks wreathed with flowers, and a fool in a scarlet cap and jingling bells was dragging them along. Then came an enormous waggon of golden hay, drawn by butterflies as large as ships in full sail, and another waggon of fruit borne by snails as large as horses. Last of all came twenty thousand golden guards with lances glittering and silver shields. And then there was a pause. The dazzling procession which had poured through the gate marched across the sky,

broke up, and dispersed, the new arrivals mingling with the crowd outside the gate. The gate grew brighter and brighter, the opening behind it began to burn with so red a gold that Leo's eyes ached, and he had to cover them with his hand. When he was able to look again, he saw the most curious sight.

"The sun! the sun!" cried Leo as an enormous ball of fire rolled slowly through the gate. "A ball of fire!" thought Leo, as he peered at it cautiously between his fingers. "Yes, but is it not certainly something more besides that? It is a face, a fiery face, and I declare it walks upon legs!"

And so it did, indeed. There were two slender black legs like those of a spider straying down to the ground from under the sun's red face, and there were little arms of the same description, which flourished about. As he walked in through the gate, Leo noticed a whole circle of long golden spears which were ranged all round the sun with the points outward. They appeared short at first, but shot suddenly out all over the sky, and Leo got a little stab from them in one of his eyes which shut it up completely. He covered the eye with his hand and made the best use he could of his other eye, trying to save it from the spears while he watched the movements of the sun.

The sun had curious little round eyes and a wide mouth, and as he rolled his face from side to side he grinned in the broadest manner, and Leo saw that it was this grin of his which shed the bright light all over the sky and poured down what we call sunshine on the earth. As Leo was observing this, the sun caught sight of his little head peeping out of the clouds and winked at him. The violence of this wink quite blinded Leo's second eye, and just as the sun marched away across the sky on his little spider legs among the crowds of his attendants, the little boy fell back into the clouds, unable to see anything more.

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A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND,
AUTHOR OF "HESTER'S HISTORY," "THE LITTLE FLOWER SEEKERS," &c.

PART II.

CHAPTER V.

LEO IS SHOT ACROSS THE SKY.

LEO sank away down through the heap of clouds, quite powerless to hold himself up any longer. He thought he was going to be smothered, but instead of that he found himself very comfortable in the middle of the cloud. There was a dew in it which oozed into his eyes and cured them both. This was very delightful, but it was not so pleasant when the cloud began to part and float off in pieces just as the other clouds had done, and as it seemed all clouds must keep on doing, no matter how steady they looked. This time the heap divided suddenly down the middle, and Leo rolled off and was just falling sheer down into nowhere, when he struck against a third Hour, another beautiful creature who was hovering in the air right beneath the cloud. She had white draperies hanging about her and bright hair spread over her shoulders, and was swinging a golden censer full of fire. Leo nearly fell head foremost into the censer, which would have been worse than dropping down nowhere, but the beautiful creature caught him by the curls on the top of his head and held him upright in the air.

"Oh, thank you!" cried Leo, "though it does hurt a little. It is better than slipping down through the air, and falling on a church steeple or something. I suppose you are another Hour?"

"Yes, I belong to the morning," said the beautiful creature; "and you had a narrow escape, I can tell you. What am I to do with you now, I wonder?"

"Oh!" said Leo, "you know the kind of thing I am, I see. I had to explain myself to the hours of the night and to the cloudman. They did not know anything about boys at all."

"That is because it is always dark when they are about, I belong to the day and can see down on the earth. I have often seen boys, and I know very well that it is very dangerous for them to be tumbling about in the sky, where nothing is solid enough for them to walk upon. My advice to you is to get down again to the earth as fast as you can."

"I'd rather see a little more since I am here," said Leo; "besides, I don't know how it could be done. You couldn't fly down with me, I suppose?"

"No," said the Hour, "I couldn't indeed; any more than you can

walk on the air. I have no wings and I cannot leave the spot where I am placed. I am hung here like a lamp, and when I am finished I go out."

"And if you were to drop me now, what would happen to me?" asked Leo.

"You would be rubbed into powder by passing through the air," said the Hour. "Not a scrap of you would remain even to light on a church steeple. Perhaps you would be blown away in dust over the deserts; that is, if the winds got hold of you. But why cannot you get down the way you came up?"

"The ash-trees carried me to the top of a mountain," said Leo, "and I crept up, but I have lost the place altogether, and I don't know where to look for it. I must shift for myself as well as I can until I find it again."

"Well," said the Hour, "there is only one thing I can do for you," and she turned her censer right upside down, so that all the fire fell out of it. "I will try and get you over to that opposite bank of clouds, and when you are there you must make the best of your time before they move. Get in here quickly," and she put Leo into the censer, doubled up like a ball. "Now I am going to fling you across, like a stone out of a sling. Are you afraid?"

"Not at all," said Leo; "but what will you do for your fire? Somebody will be angry with you, perhaps, for throwing it away."

"Don't be uneasy about that," said the Hour. "I have only to fling the censer over at the sun and it will come back again full of fire. Are you ready now, for my arms are tired? One—two—three—and away!"

She gave the censer a tremendous swing, and then let it suddenly loose on its long chains, and Leo was tilted out of it with great violence and sent spinning across the sky quite to the other side of the horizon, where he lit on a great soft bed of cloud, and lay panting and winking, with his heart beating so that he could hardly breathe.

He came with such a shock upon the clouds that they heaved under him, and he feared that they were about to split right down, as the others had done. A deep groan came from beneath him, and Leo rolled over saying, "Oh, dear me, I hope I am not hurting anything!"

"You have wakened me," said a voice, which Leo recognised as that of the cloudman.

"Oh," cried Leo, "you are here, are you?"

"I might say *you* are here, are you?" said the voice.

"I thought you went to attend on the sun," said Leo. "I wish you would come out and let me see what shape you are in at present."

"I did attend on the sun," said the voice, "and that is why I am so tired and need a little rest."

"You are always taking little rests," said Leo. "Clouds must be very lazy things, I think. And pray what were you like when you followed the sun? I saw the procession, and I dare say I was looking at you."

"I was a wild horse," said the cloudman's voice. "I had to fly

along very fast, and I kicked a great deal, and so it is no wonder I am so lazy now."

"You had a gold mane and scarlet hoofs," said Leo. "You were a very grand fellow. And what became of the little cherub with the wings who was leading you all by a silver thread?"

"How do I know where he is or what he is?" said the voice. "But pray where were you, and how have you kept yourself alive here so long?"

"The hours have been very good to me," said Leo. "A great deal more civil than you. One of them flung me over here out of her censer or I should have been rubbed into powder through the air long ago."

"Oh! is that what would have happened to you?" said the voice. "I have been wondering since I saw you what was the worst that you had to fear. As you are not a cloud, you know, I could not imagine. And where were you while the procession was going on?"

"On a cloud at the other side of the sky," said Leo. "Does this wonderful procession take place every morning?"

"Of course it does," said the cloud voice. "The sun must be properly attended."

"He is a very strange-looking old fellow," said Leo. "I never knew before that he had legs and arms. We don't know anything about that down on the earth. People think he is a world. They have very little idea that he can grin the way he does. I have often watched him out of our nursery-window coming out from behind the clouds in the mornings, but I never knew he walked. I could not have believed that there was such a crowd of beautiful people and horses and oxen and waggons and flowers and fruit and all kinds of fine things really waiting in the sky to receive him. I sometimes have thought I saw pictures in the clouds a little like these things, but I did not think it was reality."

"I told you once before that you don't know much," said the cloud voice. "If you stay up here much longer, you shall see still queerer things than you have dreamed of yet."

"Shall I, indeed?" said Leo; "then I hope I may be able to hold myself up. I am fond of seeing queer things. I wish you would come out now and let me see you again. What do you intend to be next?"

"I don't know," said the cloud voice, "and it is better for you that I am inclined to stay where I am. If I came out of this heap, the whole would split up, as you have seen us do pretty often, and you would be in as bad a plight as ever. I wonder you don't learn a little sense by experience."

"I wonder I don't," said Leo; "I might have remembered; but I am very much obliged to you for thinking of me."

"Hold your tongue, then," said the cloud voice, "and let me go to sleep." And Leo said no more, but began to gaze curiously around the sky.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SUMMER-CLOUD CHILDREN.

THE sky was now like the most exquisite blue sea, with golden islands scattered about in it, and Leo shaded his eyes with his hands to gaze across at these islands, which were covered with woods and villages and seemed to have people moving about on them. The houses were thatched with gold, he thought, and the walls were white tinged with pink. The trees glittered as if made of gold, and there seemed to be animals among them and birds and flowers. Leo spent a long time studying these islands, with his shaded eyes intently fixed on them, and he became convinced at last that he saw children at play.

"How I wish I were over there," thought Leo. "It would be much better fun than lying here in these sleepy clouds. I see one of the islands like a village, with a long street and gardens, and a castle with three towers, and a church, and a whole fleet of little boats in the blue bay by the golden shore. I am sure I see little children running in and out of the houses, and strange large animals walking about in the fields. Oh, dear, how I wish I had even a telescope!"

Just as Leo, spoke a great shoal of little cloud things came drifting along in the blue sky sea beside his hand. There were little fishes and fern-leaves, and slippers and fans and long grasses, and a great many other odds and ends made of bits of gold cloud, which looked as if they had just been swept out of the door of some genii of the sky who had been tidying up his house and garden. Among these things were a pair of little wings—beautiful feathery white wings all tinged and tipped with gold, and Leo said to himself, as he saw them coming towards him :

"Oh, now, if these were only real wings that I could fly with!" and he stretched out his hands as they went past and caught them. Strange to say they did not melt away from him as the other cloud things always did, but seemed to turn into real wings while he looked at them. Finding this, he tried to fasten them on his shoulders, and was astonished to feel them fastening themselves on and remaining as if they had grown there.

"Good gracious!" said Leo, "perhaps I can fly!" and he made a little movement upwards, just only to try if this were possible. The next moment he found himself hovering in the air with his wings spread, exactly as if he had been changed into a bird. He flew up and flew down, and flapped his wings, and could scarcely believe his senses for delight.

He flew down through the beautiful blue air, and tried to see the earth, and his father's house and the trees and gardens, but it was all such a long way off that he could distinguish nothing. He heard a loud sound of singing, coming nearer to him every moment, and saw a lark soaring towards him so very fast that it struck against his breast before it had time to see him.

"I beg your pardon," cried Leo, "but I have only just got on

wings for the first time, and I am rather awkward with them. I could not get out of your way in time."

"What kind of bird are you?" asked the lark, when he had recovered from the shaking he had got. "I never met you before."

"I am not a bird at all," said Leo; "I am a boy."

"That is ridiculous," said the lark. "I know boys very well, for I build my nest in the grass. Indeed I know them to my cost, for they robbed me and my wife of a fine family of eggs the other day. You certainly are *like* a boy, but boys do not fly about in the air."

"I ought to know best," said Leo, rather insulted.

"I know a bird when I see him," said the lark; "and I can tell you you are a bird. You are probably some new species, and have not yet got accustomed to yourself. I often hear men talking in the fields, and I know there are a great many queer discoveries going on now-a-days. You are one of them, I dare say, and that is why neither I nor yourself know you."

"Perhaps it is," said Leo, who was beginning to get bewildered.

"I dare say they will call you 'the boy-bird,'" said the lark, "from your likeness to a boy."

"That would do very well," said Leo, "as well as the blackbird or the blue-bird or the humming-bird."

"Of course you can sing?" said the lark.

"Oh, yes!" said Leo; "I can sing nursery rhymes."

"What kind of a note is that?" asked the lark. "Let me hear you," and Leo began to sing with all his might—

"Where are you going, Old Woman? says I,
Where are you going, you're going so high?
To sweep the cobwebs off the sky,
And I will be with you by-and-by."

"Very good," said the lark. "Yours is a peculiar voice for a bird. The boy likeness shows itself there also. But who was the Old Woman?"

"I don't know, really," said Leo; "I never thought of that before. I wonder who she was."

"I know," said the lark, after a moment's reflection. "She was the moon."

"But the moon is a world!" said Leo: "a beautiful silver world."

"You're wrong," said the lark. "Look at her well the next time you see her, and you'll find she's an old woman. People down on the earth spy up through telescopes, and think they see a great deal, but if they flew as high as a lark does they would know more about things."

"I wish it was night," said Leo, "and I'd fly right up to her and find out for myself."

"By the way, where do you intend to build your nest?" asked the lark. "As you are a new species, I am curious to know."

"I think I shall make it in one of those golden islands," replied Leo. "At all events I shall fly over and see what they are like."

"Good-bye, then," said the lark. "We may meet again; and I

shall be glad to introduce you to the other birds. I am going to tell everyone I meet about you."

And then the lark suddenly broke out into a perfect rage of singing and flew away.

"That is all nonsense about my being a bird, I am sure," said Leo, as he went flying across the sky; "however, I shall know better after a while."

Just then he lit upon the largest and most magnificent of the islands, the one on which he had seen the village with the long street, the gardens, the castle with the three towers, and the church. He perched upon a lovely gold strand round which the blue sky sea flowed, and when he found that he could stand on his feet for the present he took off his wings, feeling rather anxious to assure himself that he really was not a bird after all. He folded up the wings very tightly, and squeezed them together and tried to put them in his pocket; but to his great surprise and vexation they melted away between his fingers into something like smoke—and they were gone.

"That is very provoking," said Leo. "I wish I had kept them on. However, perhaps, some other way of getting along will turn up for me by the time I want to leave this place. It seems pretty solid under foot for the present."

He had hardly gone a few steps towards the street with the gold-thatched houses and the gardens, when he saw a whole troop of little soft, fluffy-looking children, made of white cloud, coming running very fast down through the cloud fields to meet him. They crowded round Leo and pushed him about and rubbed themselves against him, and when they pressed on him very hard he found to his amazement that he broke them in pieces and passed through them. They joined their pieces together again on the other side of him and came back as if nothing had happened.

"What *can* you be made of?" said a little cloud girl, hovering off from Leo and looking at him wonderingly. "You are so hard and stiff. Do you never melt at all?"

"Never," said Leo; "I should be very sorry if I did."

"How very strange!" said all the children.

"And what do you play at?" asked the little cloud girl; "for that makes half our fun."

"Why, I play at ball, and tops, and I am learning cricket," said Leo.

"We never heard of those games," said the little girl; "but come along with us now, and we will show you what we play at."

They all began to run up the field, and Leo ran after them, and they all went through a gate, which melted away to let them pass and built itself up again afterwards. Then they were in the village street, and Leo was quite astonished to see how very small the houses were although they showed so plainly at a distance.

"How in the world do you get into these houses?" asked Leo. "You are taller than they are, and the doors are so small."

"That is part of our fun," said the little cloud girl. "Come in and have some breakfast."

"They all stooped their heads and went in as easily as possible;

but when it came to be Leo's turn, he looked in at the door in dismay, and cried:

"Oh, please, don't ask me to go in. You don't know how difficult it would be to me. Besides, I am so hard I should break down the house. I shall just sit on the doorstep here and you can hand something out to me."

"That will not do at all," said the cloud children from within. "Come in! come in! and never mind about the house. What is the good of a house unless you can break it as often as you please?"

After this invitation Leo did not hesitate any longer. He put his foot on the threshold and walked boldly forward, carrying away the whole upper wall of the house on his head. He went into a parlour where all the cloud children were sitting at a long table, with their heads in the upper storey, the ceiling being pushed out of the way for the time. When Leo sat down, his head stayed upstairs like the others, and by-and-by the fragments that remained of the ceiling retreated up to the roof and allowed the children to see each other. The eatables on the table were of course made of cloud, and they melted down the children's throats as fast as they were raised to their lips. Leo found them very unsatisfying indeed, for he never felt as if he had got a mouthful of anything. He was very glad when the breakfast was over and the children proposed to take him all over the house. Then they went running about pushing aside cloud walls and rolling away cloud staircases, which seemed to be the only way they had of going over the house. They broke it all to pieces and trod on it, and then they floated off laughing and left the house to build itself up again as soon as it pleased.

The children next danced into the garden, and began to play a most curious game with the flowers, changing themselves into rose-bushes and clumps of lilies, and then back again into children. "This is the way we amuse ourselves," said the little cloud girl, "and you may look on at us as you don't know how to melt. How awfully stupid it must be to be always the same thing!"

While Leo was watching them, he also saw people of all kinds going up and down the street, old people and young people in every kind of strange dress, and they had all the same rolling or floating manner of walking, and he noticed that when two met full in the face they did not step aside and pass as other people would do, but they rolled right into one another and sometimes they never got disentangled again. A man and a woman would stumble against each other, melt into one another, and become an elephant or a camel; then the camel or the elephant would roll on, and without going much further would swallow a few men, and perhaps before he got to the end of the street he would meet a waggon, which would tumble through him and break him up into a couple of asses, or dogs, or a flock of pigeons.

It happened that, just as Leo stared at all these things, a lumbering cloud-waggon came rolling along, and the mischief-loving cloud-children hustled Leo into it, drawing the cloud-curtains round him, and shoving the waggon on its way. Leo was quite in the dark now,

and could not see anything, only felt himself tumbling about in soft, fluffy darkness, while the silvery laughter of the summer cloud-children rang like musical bells in his ears.

By-and-by the laughter ceased, and Leo saw and heard nothing more. He was floating, floating away somewhere, till his head became dizzy; and then, all at once, the wrappings parted from around him, and he perceived that the children, and the village, and the fields and gardens, had all completely disappeared.

He was sitting on a desert island of cloud, all alone.

CHAPTER VII.

BAD-WEATHER COUNTRY.

THE sky looked cold and gray all around him, the sun had disappeared, the beautiful golden islands were gone, and in their place were large, dark tracts of cloud, like deserts and wildernesses. Leo had scarcely time to feel vexed at this change when he felt a sudden blow on his back, and was lifted up by a squall of wind and spun across the sky, as if he had been a flash of lightning. He was flung with far greater violence than when he had been carried on the Moment's back or shot from the censer. He was dashed not only across the sky, but through and through the clouds at the other side of the horizon, so far that he made a great hole, which seemed a mile deep; and when he, at last, ceased moving, he found himself struggling to swim in a great sea, where everything was dark round the shores.

"Well, well!" thought Leo, "it seems the weather has changed. Now I am going to see where the rain and the storm come from! That blow the wind gave me was pretty well as a beginning. A sturdy chap he must be, wherever he has puffed to. I wish he had spoken to me!"

His eyes began to get accustomed to this new region, and after a time he perceived that the shores were not all blank, dark mounds, as he at first supposed, but were covered with groups of people who were coming and going, plunging into the water, and hurrying over the verge of the distant hills. Leo made great efforts to reach the shores, as the water felt cold, and he was anxious to know what these people could be about.

When he touched the shore he found that it was hard as iron and icy cold; it seemed to be altogether a mass of ice. The people were men with large beards hanging with icicles, and women wrapped in long dark cloaks and streaming veils, and they were busy making up large balls of ice and snow and flinging them down into the dark lake where they melted away and disappeared immediately. Dark, heavy-looking children were also engaged in the same employment, and sometimes they quarrelled and pelted each other with the balls of ice. Leo made his way to where they were, and sat down among

them, and asked them questions about who they might be, and what they were doing.

"This is Bad-Weather Country," they said. "We are the children of the bad weather, and we are sending rains and floods and torrents down upon the earth."

"Oh, are you, indeed?" said Leo. "So I may thank you for the dreadful wet days, when one can only sit staring out of the nursery-window, and must not dare to take a step out of doors."

"Just so," said the children.

"Oh, I say!" shouted Leo, "stop that fellow over there! Hallo!"

"What do you mean?" said the children.

"Why there's a fellow tumbled into the lake after his ball," cried Leo. "Oh, I declare, he's vanished! He's drowned!"

The children laughed, a pattering, chilly kind of laugh, that sounded like rain falling on window panes.

"Oh, you stupid!" they said. "Don't you know that is part of his business."

"No, I don't," said Leo. "Nobody has any business to drown himself, I know."

The children laughed still more loudly. "We don't know anything about drowning here," they said. "It is only on earth that such silly things happen."

"Then what has become of the chap?" asked Leo.

"Oh, he's only gone down below to superintend some of the works," said the children.

"Indeed!" said Leo.

"Yes, to be sure."

"And will he ever come back?"

"Of course he will come back. Why, you are the most ignorant creature we ever came across."

"Don't be so hard upon a fellow!" said Leo. "I am a stranger here, you know. I came up from the earth."

"Oh, that accounts for it. Well, do you see those people over there in the distance who are constantly coming over the hills and scattering themselves on the shores? Those are some of our folks who have gone down through the lake, and have come up again with their business done. Do you see them?"

Leo looked, and as his eyes had got accustomed to the foggy twilight of the place he saw distinctly all that was going on around him. The people on the shores—men, women, and children—were continually flinging themselves into the lake, and disappearing, and at the same time figures as if made of mist were constantly arriving over hills of mist away behind in the clouds, and coming down to the shores, becoming more solid every moment, till they at last appeared just the same as the others who were at work.

"And are those really the same chaps who plunged into the lake?" asked Leo; "and where have they been, and what have they been doing? Oh, but I'm sure you are joking. I really can't believe it, you know!"

"We will show you whether we are joking or not," said the chil-

dren. "Half a dozen of us will go down through the lake this very moment, and you wait here till we come back. Then we will tell you what we have been doing."

"Very well," said Leo. "That will be capital."

"I shall take a snow-storm with me," said one of the children.

"And I, a flood," said another.

"And I shall bring frost to nip the fruit blossoms," said a third.

"Oh, dear," said Leo, "can you do nothing but mischief?"

"We intend to bring gentle rains and dew," said the other three children, "and we will tell you what we do with them as soon as we come back."

As they spoke, all six of them rolled into the gloomy lake, and they kissed hands to Leo, just as the waters closed over their heads.

Leo gazed after them as long as a vestige of them was to be seen, and then he sat down, quite still, in profound astonishment.

"To think of all these things going on up here," reflected he, "and how little about anything we know down there in that foolish world of ours! It ought to be put in the Geography, it ought! I'll ask papa to write to the newspapers about it, as soon as I go home."

Leo sat waiting in anxious expectation of the return of his clever little friends. He took care not to quit the spot where they had left him, lest he might miss them in the crowd and never be able to find them again. He amused himself, meanwhile, by watching the movements of the other people round him, and the time passed so quickly that it seemed only a few minutes till he saw them coming racing towards him over the hills of mist, themselves all softened into mist, and melting and rolling about in the strangest manner possible.

"Why, you don't mean to say you have been down on the earth, since?" said Leo.

"Haven't we, indeed?" cried the children. "We think we have, rather!"

"Well, there is one thing," said Leo, "you cannot have been doing much, either good or bad, while you were away, after all your boasting, for you have not had time."

"Oh, didn't we, though? And why shouldn't we have time in the course of a year?"

"A year!" cried Leo. "Why you are only gone from here about a quarter of an hour."

A wild chorus of their own peculiar pattering laughter broke from the rain-children, and they rolled about and spread themselves over everything, so dreadfully like mere fragments of mist that Leo became quite nervous lest they should never be able to pick themselves up and gather themselves together again. However, his mind was soon relieved in this respect, for they presently not only settled themselves into proper shape, but hardened themselves gradually into ice. Then they all sat round him to tell their adventures.

THE WALKING TREES.**A STORY FOR CHILDREN.**

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PART III.**CHAPTER VIII.****ADVENTURES OF THE RAIN-CHILDREN.**

"You chap with the snow-storm," said Leo, "do you speak first, and tell us what you did with it? I must say you are a very small fellow to carry about a snow-storm in your pocket."

"When I passed down through the lake," said the rain-child, "I came out at the bottom of the clouds that hang above your earth. Then I floated about a long time, and hovered away over the world, growing larger as I went along, and spreading myself out into great trails of mist. At last I came and paused above a beautiful mountainous country called Switzerland—have you ever heard of it?"

"I should think so," said Leo. "My mamma and papa were there lately, and have just come home."

"Well, I came and took up my station behind a mountain peak, just over a pretty little village which lay at its foot. I waited there a long time, curled round a high crag and basking in the sunshine, and I gazed down into the village and soon came to know every creature that lived in it, and all their occupations and affairs. I knew all the village children particularly well, and there were two nice little things who played about together, and I took a great fancy to them, and used to watch them at all their games. They were not dark, heavy lumps of children, like us up here, but had nice rosy cheeks, like yours, and bright eyes and soft skins. Their mother and father lived in a pretty little house a short way above the village, and the children were fond of roaming up the mountains as far as their little wandering feet would carry them. Their father was a chamois hunter, and they loved to climb the crags to meet him on his way home.

"One day I thought I had hung about the mountain peaks long enough, and that it was high time to see about business; so I began to puff and blow, and spread myself out till I darkened the sun and covered the whole of the blue sky with threatening clouds. Then I let loose the snow-storm over the world, and it fell, and fell, till the houses in the village were nearly covered up, and the mountains were awfully sheeted in white. On the first evening of the fall I looked down and laughed to see the children all flying home, shouting and shrieking with glee——"

"Such fun!" cried Leo. "Don't I wish I had been there!"

"Yes, it was great fun for awhile," continued the rain-child; "but very soon everybody was safely shut up indoors, and then I gave way

to my most fantastic gambols, "and danced and whirled and spun round the world."

"I know the way," said Leo, "I have seen you at it many a time; though I didn't know it was you, you know!"

"I kept on like that," said the rain-child, "till the mountains completely lost their senses, and the earth fell into a swoon. Then I held my breath a little, and peered down through the hurly-burly; and what do you think I saw then?"

"I don't know," said Leo, eagerly.

"Ah," said the rain-child, "there I saw my two little favourite children from the village, wandering along in the wilderness of snow, very far from home, staggering and falling, and struggling upon their feet again, and clinging together and crying and moaning. They had come out to meet their father, as usual, and lost their way in the snow. Nobody was near them, and they were almost worn out with cold and fatigue and terror."

"Oh, dear," said Leo, "this is dreadful! I hope they didn't die. If you killed them, I can never speak to you again."

"You needn't talk like that," said the rain-child. "I was quite as sorry about it as you can be, but I don't know what you could do yourself, if you had a snow-storm to work with."

"That is true," said Leo; "but do go on."

"I was in such a state of distress," said the rain-child, "that I howled and shrieked frantically all round the mountains, but that did no good at all."

"No," said Leo.

"At last the poor little things fell down and dropped asleep."

"That was good," said Leo.

"No, indeed, it was the worst thing could happen. They were sure to sleep themselves to death. I tore myself to pieces a thousand times in my despair over them; till at last, oh! what joy I felt when I heard the dear, friendly bark of a dog, and saw one coming scouring along, snuffing and puffing with his warm breath streaming on the air, and a lantern round his neck. He soon found the children, and began licking them all over, and barking to waken them; and quickly following him came their father, the chamois-hunter, and some of his friends. They carried my little darlings home, and put them in bed, and they were soon as well as if nothing had happened. The storm went on, of course—I couldn't stop it; but I can tell you I shrieked and laughed my delight round the mountains for three whole days without stopping after that."

"I am so glad the children were saved," said Leo. "But what did the people think of your laughing?"

"Oh, they didn't know the difference," said the rain-child. "They only said: 'What a savage snow-storm!'"

"And are you sure the children are quite well now?" asked Leo.

"The last thing I did before I left the country," said the rain-child, "was to look down at the dear little pair at their play. I should never have been happy again if I had taken the beautiful rosy colour out of their lips for ever, and the sparkle out of their eyes."

"You're not a bad fellow, I see," said Leo, "though at first I was afraid you were. But I hope you didn't frighten the poor little things again by looking down at them."

"No, I was wrapped up in a lovely white cloud then," said the rain-child, "as soft and bright as could be. Nobody could be afraid of me then. But now my brothers must tell you their stories."

"Mine is a terrible story," said the second rain-child, "and I would rather not say much about it. I brought a torrent with me, you know, and I can tell you it did not scruple to do damage. We swept away a whole village in one night—men, women, and children, houses, trees, cattle, everything was destroyed by the morning's dawn."

Leo shrank away and covered his face with his hands.

"You cruel creature!" he said, "how could you do such a dreadful thing?"

"You needn't blame me," said the second rain-child, "I only perform my appointed work. I should have been very glad, indeed, if anything could have saved the people. I'm not at all proud of what I have done, and shall be glad if my next brother has got something more pleasant to tell."

"I haven't much to say, good or bad," said the third rain-child. "I nipped the fruit-blossoms with the frost, as I said I should, and I pinched people's noses shockingly; but I also sweetened the air for spring, and made beautiful pictures for the children on their window-panes."

"I'd like to hear what these three others have been doing," said Leo. "They seemed to have better hearts than yours when you were all setting out."

"Hearts have nothing to do with it," said the fourth rain-child. "Our hearts are all good enough, but we must do our duty. Your mother's heart is very good, although sometimes she must punish you. I, for one, am right glad when I get a happy task to do, and so also, I am sure, are my brothers."

"Tell me what you have been about," said Leo.

"I wrapped myself up in a delicate cloud," said the fourth rain-child, "and floated away, away over the burning desert. I knew well that I should have a chance of doing good before long. As I lay across the heavens, gazing down upon the scorched sands, I suddenly saw the figure of a lonely traveller, making his way painfully along the terrible plains. His brow was blistered, his tongue swollen and parched in his mouth; his poor heart throbbed wildly with the fever that burned in his veins. After watching him a long time I saw that he grew dizzy and faint, and he flung himself at last from his horse, and fell with a groan to the ground."

"I looked and saw the cause of his new anguish: he had reached the oasis where once had welled a spring. The waters were dried, and had vanished away. Thinking of his loving little children at home he laid himself down and expected to die."

"'Have mercy, O God!' he cried, 'and send me a drop of water. But if not, Thy will be done!'"

"Now I knew my time had arrived, and I sent forth the delicious

rain gliding through the fevered air like God's own benediction from heaven. The spring was replenished, and the waters welled to the traveller's lips. Falling on his knees, he drank and prayed; and my gentle rain went with him all the remainder of his journey, and brought him in safety to his children and his home."

"Beautiful!" cried Leo, "I am so glad you went down from here to show me what you could do."

"A city was on fire, and I put out the flames," said the fifth rain-child. "There was terrible confusion and dismay, but nobody was lost. That is the most important bit of work I have had on my hands since I left home."

"And I have been busy the entire time watering flowers, dropping dews on young growing seeds, and doing many little useful offices all round the world," said the sixth rain-child. "By a great mistake, I very nearly spoiled a fine harvest; but fortunately I was able to pull up in time, so that no great damage has been done."

"That is pleasant," said Leo. "I really am very glad to know you all, and to hear so much about everything you do. I am sure now there are many other things you could tell me about."

"Plenty," said the rain-children. "How would you like to be introduced to the great King Storm?"

"I should like it immensely," said Leo, with sparkling eyes.

"But you will have to travel a good way higher over the hills of mist," said the children. "However, if you are not afraid, we can pull you through somehow, seeing that there are six of us to help you."

"I am not at all afraid," said Leo, eagerly; and they all began to move.

CHAPTER IX.

AT HOME WITH-KING STORM.

AWAY went Leo and the rain-children over the mist hills and down into a dim, grey valley, where nothing was seen but long shadows, and paths of pale light streaming across the wilderness.

"What strange place is this?" asked Leo, shivering.

"This is the Calm that comes before the Storm," said the rain-children.

"I don't like it at all," said Leo. "It is a dreadful place. I'd rather we could get to the Storm at once."

The rain-children answered by a shower of laughter.

"Perhaps you may not like him so well when you come near him," they said.

"Why?" asked Leo. "Is his Majesty so very awful?"

"Rather," said one of the rain-children; "especially in some of his moods. If you happen to meet him with a hurricane on his shoulder, I advise you to look out for squalls!"

"How are we to get near him, then?" said Leo. "I thought we were going to visit him and have some fun."

"Our only chance," said the first rain-child, "is to watch our opportunity, when he is either sound asleep or away from home. We may manage to catch a glimpse of him, and that will be enough for you, I can tell you; but I should like you to see his palace, and some of our friends who live in it."

At this moment flecks of soft golden haze appeared shimmering across the distance, like a wreath of sunset clouds, containing linked figures in a band moving sweetly and swiftly along the edges of the gray wilderness.

"What is that?" asked Leo.

"Oh, those are some of our friends the breezes, going off on an expedition," said the second rain-child. "Do you see them kissing hands to us?"

"I am afraid the old gentleman must be at home," said the first rain-child; "for when he is abroad the breezes generally stay within and amuse themselves."

The breezes disappeared, and Leo and the rain-children travelled on, till the gray desert with the pale paths which Leo disliked so much was left behind, and glittering hills with sharp peaks quivering in light began to rise gradually all around them. Climbing these glassy hills, and winding by slippery ways up into fierce shining mountains, the little party got along, the rain-children helping Leo: pushing him from behind and pulling him in front, when sometimes he could no longer keep his feet on the difficult paths. At last when with great effort they made their way up to a lofty height, a magnificent spectacle suddenly burst on their view.

A splendid palace, built of gigantic crystals, rose upon the mountain, soaring out of it, as if the glittering mountain itself had been shaped into a dwelling for a king. The transparent walls and pillars and domes seemed to possess an extraordinary life of their own; for as Leo gazed at them he saw a continual movement, as of rushing air, going on behind their polished surface. It was like *seeing the wind*, Leo thought, and he trembled to think of what might happen if some accident were to make never so small a break in the glassy walls, letting all that imprisoned power burst forth.

"I wonder the place doesn't blow up," said Leo, to the rain-children. "If you shut up steam in a bottle, it will break the bottle in pieces. My papa showed me about that; and I'm sure these walls don't look as strong as a bottle—more like soap-bubbles that I can blow out of a pipe! Why all that storm doesn't split them into bits, I'm sure I can't think—can you?"

"That isn't Storm at all," said the rain-children. "It is only his breath. Storm himself is the king, as we thought you understood; and all that puffing and rushing of air within the crystals shows that he is at home. Every breath he breathes flies through walls, pillars, and roofs of his palace, just as your blood rushes through your veins from your heart."

"Dear me!" cried Leo. "How very strange!"

"When he goes off on business, of course he takes his breath with him, and then the palace is a beautiful quiet place, quite safe for people like us to explore."

"I wish he had happened to be away from home," said Leo. "Does he often go? I should think he must; for our world is a very stormy place, and ought to keep him pretty busy."

A little drift of the rain-children's laughter broke on Leo's ears at this.

"Do you imagine he does all that work himself?" they said. "No, indeed; he has different sorts of people to do ordinary business for him—gales, and winds, and squalls, and stiff breezes. The gales are tremendous fellows, some of them might pass for the king himself; and he intrusts to them a great deal of his weightiest business."

"Oh yes, indeed!" said Leo. "Now I think of it, I have heard my papa say, when the trees were roaring and bending round our house of an evening, 'Those are the equi—equi—' oh dear! what was the word, I wonder!"

"We don't know what you mean by equi," said the rain-children.

"I have it," cried Leo: "noctial!"

"What is 'noctial,'" said the rain-children.

"Equinoctial gales," said Leo. "They are some of your people, I suppose. They come about our place now and again."

"You can call them what you like," said the rain-children. "We don't know anything about that."

"Well, go on," said Leo.

"Then there are lots of winds," said the rain-children. "North-winds, south-winds, east-winds, west-winds: and they also do a great deal that saves trouble to the king. The squalls are exceedingly mischievous, and accomplish more by their tricks than by their strength. Altogether, it is only when some very terrific work is to be done that King Storm himself condescends to come out and do it."

"Well, I must say," said Leo, "it is too hard to arrive here at the very door and not get in. I wish you would try and gain admittance to the palace."

"We may try," said the rain-children; "but I warn you, we shall meet with rough usage."

"Never mind," said Leo, "that will only be fun."

They now began to draw nearer to the palace, and as Leo looked it brought to his mind a scene, described to him by his uncle, of dawn among the Himalaya mountains. The most lovely hues of rose and violet tinged the glittering turrets and pinnacles, and a deep purple shadow lay under the arch of the gigantic drawbridge which sprang like a bridge of glass over a vast gulf of nothingness between the travellers and the palace. Leo led the way boldly across the drawbridge, and blew a silver bugle which hung by the crystal gate.

Four great twisted pillars of crystal guarded the gate, and as Leo heard the piercing music of the silver bugle winding away into the airy distance, he observed how the Storm's breath was rushing through the twisted pillars, so that they seemed to move and palpitate with life. The gate itself seemed nothing but a sheet of glass, and yet

when Leo pushed it he found it strong as iron and impossible to break. The rain-children stood by, and laughed at him while he hammered on it with both his little fists.

Presently a rushing sound was heard, and forth from an inner archway burst a troop of airy creatures with long, streaming hair, and wildly-floating mantles, who dashed down the glittering path to the gate, wrestling with each other, pushing, struggling, tripping each other up, everyone elbowing his neighbour and trying to get first to the gate of clear crystal at which the six dark, heavy-looking rain-children and the little human rosy-cheeked boy were standing, waiting to get admittance to the palace of King Storm.

"You can't get in! you can't get in!" shrieked the wind-creatures, pushing against the gate. "The king is in a fury, just getting ready to set off with a cyclone."

"A cyclone?" said Leo.

"Certainly. Did you never hear of a cyclone?"

"Oh yes," said Leo. "I remember now. It is a terrible hurricane that tears up trees and houses by the roots. My uncle told me about one that happened while he was in India."

"We had better not stand here talking about it much longer," said the rain-children, "unless we intend to be blown into fragments. Let us lie flat on our faces until the king comes out and goes past."

"That would be wise, indeed," said the wind-creatures, who then separated themselves into two bands, and frolicked about in the air at either side of the crystal gates. Leo and the rain-children, in the meantime, laid themselves flat, much against Leo's will, who would rather have stood bolt upright with his hands in his pockets, and his eyes fixed on the opening through which the great Storm King was to make his appearance. As it was, he contrived to keep a corner of one eye open, and peered upward with it in the best way he could. Suddenly was heard a frightful crash, like near thunder, and Leo, making a great effort to look, caught just one glimpse of a gigantic face, pale and fierce, as if with passion, eyes and nostrils streaming white fire; the next moment a monstrous foot was planted right beside him, and the brave little boy felt a shock which threw him into a swoon. When he recovered his senses, Leo found the rain-children picking him up, and the wind-creatures frolicking about and holding their sides with laughing, while the crystal gates stood open, that Leo and his companions might enter, with welcome, into the palace. The Storm King was gone, cyclone and all, and his retainers were quite ready to hold a revel in his absence.

The wind-creatures joined hands in a circle round their visitors, and swept them through the crystal gates, and up the sloping, glittering path in under the open archway that led into the palace.

There Leo was struck dumb with amazement at sight of the vast airy halls that spread on every side as he entered. Down from roofs which were so high he could not see them wound light gleaming staircases twining round crystal pillars like those outside, only the pent-up breath of the Storm King no longer kept restlessly rushing

through them. And as Leo strained his gaze upward to the soaring staircases he beheld wonderful figures descending by them, some tall and powerful-looking and like strong warriors, others fair, delicate, and smiling, like playful girls.

"These," said the rain-children, "are King Storm's retainers, who have been away about his affairs, and are returning and coming down here to rest themselves in his absence."

"Dear me!" said Leo; "have they got a hall-door on the roof of the palace? I have heard it said that when flying machines come into fashion all the hall-doors will be made on the tops of the houses. Have they got flying machines up here?—But oh, how silly I am—of course they are all flying machines themselves."

"I should think so," said the rain-children, "and besides that they are extremely pleasant creatures. I advise you to join in their dances and amusements, They will like you the better for it, and you will have much more fun."

As the rain-children spoke, Leo saw the halls fill quickly with wind-creatures, gales, winds, stiff breezes and mild breezes—all floating about, laughing and chasing each other, or wreathing themselves in long chains, which the others broke through when they met them. Leo felt himself caught up among them and whirled hither and thither at their will, till his head was so dizzy that he did not know where he was, or what wild thing could be happening to him. Presently they began to dance to a sort of strange, murmuring music which came from the movement of the dancers. It was like the sighing and piping of the wind on a rough evening at home, and Leo tried to think about that, and to make up his mind as to what was the cause of the likeness; but his head was spinning madly, and his breath was taken away, and he even felt as if dying in the struggle and confusion.

I do not know what would have become of him only that a kind young breeze caught him in her arms, and snatched him out of the crowd of the bewildering dancers. She carried him away into an empty hall, where he recovered his breath, and was able to speak to her. She was a charming young creature, with a sweet, rosy face, and a pale gleaming of gold about her dress.

"Oh, thank you!" said Leo, "you are very kind," as she fluttered round him and breathed on his head and his hands. Her breath had the most delicious perfume of violets, and Leo felt pleasantly refreshed as she hovered about and kissed him and petted him.

"Some of our friends here are rather rough," she said, "though they mean no harm. Now if you come with me I will show you some things that may amuse you."

Leo followed her through the vast halls, till they came to one which was lined with crystal pillars, and between the pillars there seemed to be dim pictures, wide and dim, with lights and colours struggling in them, as if out of a deep and wonderful distance.

"What strange pictures!" said Leo, peering at them; "I cannot make out what they are."

"These are not pictures, but visions," said the breeze. "If you

gaze at them steadily, one after another, you will see a good deal of what is going on at our hands in different parts of the world."

Leo walked slowly round the hall staring at each in turn. At first he could see very little, but after gazing earnestly for some time, he found that each of these seeming pictures was indeed a strange piece of reality laid before his eyes.

After peering attentively into the first for a few moments, Leo clasped his hands and screamed aloud.

"What do you see?" asked the breeze.

"Oh, I see a dreadful dark sea at night!" cried Leo, "and a vessel driven about and going to pieces in the raging storm! The waves are foaming, and people are swallowed up in them. Oh, it is frightful! Cannot we do something to save them?"

"No," said the breeze, sadly, and drew Leo away to the next picture or vision.

"What do you see now?" she asked again.

"I see a beautiful bright ocean," said Leo, gladly, "and such a glorious ship with its sails spread, moving so swiftly across the shining waves. People are waving handkerchiefs, and laughing, and clapping their hands. I suppose they are coming safely into port."

"Yes, indeed," said the breeze, "and that is pleasanter than the last. The next is very frightful, and you must not take more than a glance at it."

It was terrible, indeed. In the darkness of night a house was on fire, and the wind was blowing the flames wildly and increasing their fury. A red glare shone on upturned faces below, and some of them were full of agony and fear. Leo covered his face with his hand, and the breeze drew him on, leaving the horror behind.

After this there was a forest of gigantic trees, torn and lashed by the tempest; followed by many other pictures of different scenes, peaceful or terrible, in which the winds had an active part. Last of all came a delightful garden, full of the most lovely flowers of every hue, tended by a band of delicate creatures, so like his present kind companion that Leo knew at once that they must be breezes. Over this pleasant vision he lingered a long time, watching the breezes gently picking the dead leaves from the blossoms, fanning the buds open, and taking the scent from the hearts of the flowers upon their breath to scatter it sweetly over the place.

But at last he grew tired even of this, and the breeze said to him:

"Should you like to return to the dancers, or is there anything you wish particularly to see and know about?"

"I should be glad if you would take me up one of your wonderful winding staircases," said Leo. "I would give anything to see what you have got at the top of it."

"Come, then," said the breeze, smiling, and sweeping the little boy on before her, they began to mount a staircase close at hand which twined round one of the crystal pillars.

Up and up they went, the breeze fluttering behind Leo, and wafting him over step after step, so that he had no need to clutch at the glittering balustrade as he had fully intended to do. Higher and

higher they went, losing sight of the halls below and as yet reaching nothing ; and Leo thought of a picture he had seen of the angels ascending and descending on Jacob's ladder in a dream.

"This is reality, though," thought Leo, "and I am going up myself, instead of merely looking at the angels."

Just as this thought passed through his mind, the staircase shook violently, and a convulsion seemed to have seized the whole palace.

"It is the king returning !" cried the breeze, in a tone of alarm.

Before she had time to say another word, a terrific crash seemed to split up the whole of creation. The shock threw Leo into a deadly swoon ; and, as the Storm King re-entered his palace, the little boy was spun away into space, and remembered nothing more.

CHAPTER X.

THE SNOW'S KINGDOM.

THE next time Leo opened his eyes and looked round to see where he might be, he found that palace, staircase, drawbridge, and all, had disappeared, and that wind-creatures and rain-children and breezes had deserted him. He was in a great white world, completely alone.

Oh, what a strange place it was ! Nothing but vast plains of snow lying on every side of him. Was it really snow ? He took up a handful and looked at it. Yes, it was snow. It did not melt, as earthly snow would do ; but still it was snow. It did not shift and break up in fragments like the clouds, but his feet sank in it when he walked. He was certainly in a world of snow.

Away he went pattering through it as well as he could, leaving little dark foot-prints behind him as he walked. Now and again he stopped and listened and looked around. There was nothing floating, moving, soaring, or singing. All was silence, and flat, deathly whiteness.

Then he trudged on again. At last, feeling rather lonely, he called out loudly, at the top of his voice ; but nothing stirred, and no answer was given. To keep up his heart he sang and whistled, and tried to assure himself that he was not at all afraid of these dreadful white wildernesses ; but with all his bravery, it must be owned that his teeth began to chatter and his knees to shake.

"If there was going to be any end of it, you know, or anyone to speak to !" said Leo, to himself.

At this moment he saw the first glimpse of some new forms in the whiteness—tall, bristling, glittering things that stood together in a vast spreading crowd, like a forest of icicle-trees. As he drew nearer to the strange appearance, he saw that this was indeed a magnificent frost forest with spreading palms and pluming ferns.

"Oho !" said Leo, to himself, "this is the place we see on the window-panes in the frosty winter mornings. I often wished I could get into it for a while ; so here goes !"

And in he plunged bravely into the middle of the ice-trees, pushing his way carefully among them, and sometimes pricking his fingers with the jagged edges of the frozen leaves. As he went deeper and deeper into the glittering thickets the most exquisite coloured lights came gleaming out of the distance, exactly like the glowing rays he had often seen lurking in crystal ornaments in the drawing-room at home.

These beautiful darting lights almost blinded him, and so he was hardly sure whether or not he really saw curious little snow-white figures of children lying sleeping along the branches of the trees, and sitting perched among the boughs with their knees drawn up to their chins, and their wild, pale faces smiling down at him.

"I often wondered if there were really live people hiding in these forests," thought Leo, "and now I know there are plenty of snow-children here, at all events."

And he stopped under a tree and looked up.

"I say!" he cried. "What jolly good slides you must have there on the barest boughs; I wish you would help me up to you. The trunks are all so slippery that I cannot reach a place to put my feet!"

But in answer to this, the snow-children who were awake perching in the branches only answered:

"We can't come down until thawing time begins." And they laughed in a way that sounded like crackling ice.

"When will that be?" asked Leo, of a sweet little snow-maiden who was peering down at him with merry bright eyes looking out of a cluster of icicle ringlets.

"When the Snow Queen turns in her sleep," answered the little girl, gaily.

"When will that be?" asked Leo.

"How should I know?" said the snow-girl.

"Go away! go away!" shrieked a whole flock of the snow-children, looking down at him, and shaking their little fists. "Your breath is beginning to melt us. The tears are already running down our cheeks!"

"Dear me!" said Leo; "how very strange!" and he saw that his breath was puffing before his face like steam; and he was too much surprised to do anything but stare upward at the children, who soon brought him to his senses, however, by pelting him with icicles till he fled like the wind.

As soon as he stopped to take breath, he found that he had come to a very large clearing in the frost-forest. Here was a lovely plain of untrodden snow, broken only here and there by beds of glittering ice-flowers. In the centre of all stood a transparent palace built of ice.

Up and down, and round and round the palace, walked bands of snow-figures, with long trailing robes, and heads leaning low on their breasts. Their hands were folded, and they looked like people who were patiently waiting for some wonderful event to take place. None of them took the slightest notice of Leo. Their noiseless, wreathing movement had the most beautiful and awful effect, and the coloured

lights fell gleaming from the ice-trees and jewelled all the palace walls.

Leo wandered about and tried to attract the notice of the snow-people by plucking their skirts. When this had no effect, he marched boldly into the palace to discover what he could.

There were halls and pillars of ice, and carpets of snow.

"One would need to have frost-nails in one's shoes like the horses, to walk here," said Leo; and he tried in vain to ascend the staircase, coming slipping wildly back again at every step he made. At last he gave up the attempt, and began to consider about crossing the glittering hall. He bethought him of a plan, and taking a flying race from outside, he went gliding along the pavement just as if it had been a slide at home. In this way he dashed suddenly into the chamber of the Queen of Snow!

There she was, lying on her couch, covered with white draperies, and fast asleep. She was far the most lovely creature that Leo had ever seen—so calm, so pure, so fair, so mighty—with her beautiful face upturned, and her noble head pillowed upon her arm. Round her, crouched upon the floor, sat twelve bowed figures, as motionless, though not so lovely as herself. Well, whether it was that her time for moving had come, or that Leo's violent arrival had disturbed her, I cannot say, but just as he entered the door, she heaved a sigh, and the Snow Queen turned in her sleep!

Instantly a sound as of weeping was heard, a rushing and trickling like showers of sudden tears. Everything was in a wet state round Leo, and when he hurried away to see what could be happening outside, he found the ice-forests and the snow-lawns all dissolving away. The little snow-children came flying out of the frost-forests and danced round Leo, while they were all gradually melting and trickling into nothing before his eyes. While he stood there among them lost in amazement, he perceived that his old friends the rain-children were frolicing in the crowd, and, more surprising still, that the wind-creatures were also appearing, coming crashing through the ice-forests in the most boisterous manner. Very soon they were all capering together in the maddest way, forming flying circles round Leo, who was dragged about with them and felt that he was sinking, sinking, as everything was whirling and floating around and beneath him.

"We are all of the same family!" said his old friend the first rain-child, nodding at Leo; "and we often work together!"

Just with this there was a loud report and a hissing noise, and a flaring light. Leo looked round wildly, and beheld capering overhead a fierce-looking being, brandishing a red-hot, two-pronged, gigantic fork in its claw. Before he had time to scream, the terrible weapon was thrust into the skirts of Leo's little knickerbocker jacket, and as he went whirling through the air he heard a chorus of mocking laughter, and the cry—

"Hurrah! hurrah! he's off with the forked lightning!"